

A N  
A P P E A L  
T O

The serious and candid Professors  
of Christianity, //

On the following SUBJECTS, viz.

- I. The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion,
- II. The Power of Man to do the Will of God,
- III. Original Sin,
- IV. Election and Reprobation,
- V. The Divinity of Christ,

A N D,

- VI. Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ.

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By a LOVER of the GOSPEL.

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The FIFTH EDITION, with Improvements,

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*To us there is one God, the FATHER; and one Mediator, the MAN*  
CHRIST JESUS. 1 Cor. viii. 6.—1 Tim. ii. 5.

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## An Appeal to the serious and candid Professors of Christianity.

*My Christian Brethren,*

**P**ERMIT one, who professes obedience to the same Lord, and faith in the precious promises of the same gospel with yourselves, to address himself to you, with all freedom and plainness of speech, upon subjects relating to our common salvation. I need not tell you that these subjects are interesting. In reality, nothing else is interesting in comparison with them. For what is this world compared with the future! What is time compared with eternity! Believe me, my brethren, it is nothing but the deepest concern for the honour of a religion which is the most valuable inheritance of the human race, and which sets us above all the follies and vices, all the weaknesses and troubles of life, by giving us the most solid hope in death, that has induced me to solicit your attention. But I am confident that you will not think it ill bestowed, because it is upon a subject that is near and dear to you, and the consideration of which cannot but please and profit you.

If, by the blessing of God upon our common endeavours to *lead and to be led into all truth*, I shall be so happy as to bring you to entertain the same views of these things with myself, we shall rejoice together; and if, after all that I may be able to advance, you should still think differently from me, I trust you will, at least, be disposed to think with more candour of some of your fellow-christians, who love the gospel, and are zealous for its honour, though you may think them mistaken in their conceptions concerning it. Let me intreat you, therefore, my brethren, to give me a patient and candid hearing. Attend, in the spirit of

meekness, to what I shall say from the earnestness of my heart; and exercise the reason which God has given you upon this occasion, which is the noblest on which it can be exercised, and for which you may, therefore, conclude, that it was principally given you.

### I. *Of the Use of Reason in matters of religion.*

**B**E not backward, or afraid, my brethren to make use of your reason in matters of religion, or where the scriptures are concerned. They both of them proceed from the same God and Father of us all, who is the giver of every good and every perfect gift: They cannot, therefore, be contrary to one another, but must mutually illustrate and enforce one another. Besides, how can we distinguish one scheme of religion from another, so as to give the preference to that which is the most deserving of it, but by the help of our reason and understanding? What would you yourselves say to a Mahometan, whom you would persuade to abandon the imposture of Mahomet, and embrace christianity, but bid him use his reason; and judge, by the help of it, of the manifest difference between the two religions, and the great superiority of yours to his? Does not God himself appeal to the reason of man, when he condescends to ask us, *Whether his ways be not equal?* Ez. xviii. 29. Does not the apostle exhort us that, *in understanding we be men?* 1 Cor. xiv. 20. Are we not expressly commanded to *prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good?* 1 Thess. v. 21. Also, when we are commanded to *search the scriptures*, John v. 39, more must be meant than merely reading them, or receiving implicitly, the interpretations of others. Searching must imply an earnest endeavour to find out for ourselves, and to understand the truths contained in the scriptures; and what faculty can we employ for this purpose, but that which is commonly called *reason*, whereby we are capable of thinking, reflecting, comparing, and judging of things?

Disfrust, therefore, all those who decry human reason, and who require you to abandon it, wherever religion



religion is concerned. When once they have gained this point with you, they can lead you whither they please, and impose upon you every absurdity which their sinister views may make it expedient for them that you should embrace. A Popish priest would require nothing more than this, to make you believe the doctrine of transubstantiation, and that a man is infallible; or to persuade you to commit the most flagrant wickedness, as a means of *doing God service*. For the first of these articles they do not fail to urge the words of scripture, which expressly say, concerning the bread that is used in the Lord's supper, that it *is the body of Christ*; Matt. xxvi. 6. and there is no possibility of replying to them, but by appealing to reason, as the necessary and proper judge of the sense of scripture. The Papist, therefore, as might well be expected, is forward, on all occasions, to vilify human reason, and to require men to abandon it; but true Protestants will not part with it. It is by the help of reason, in conjunction with the scriptures, that we guard ourselves against the gross delusions of the Papists, who, after relinquishing reason, have been *made to believe a lie*; and by the diligent and continued use of the same power, let us endeavour to combat every remaining error, and trace out and reform every corruption of christianity, till we hold the pure *truth as it is in Jesus*, and *obey it in the love thereof*.

Do not think that, by recommending the use of reason, I am about to decry the scriptures. My appeal shall be to both, upon every subject upon which I address you; and I think you cannot but see that the plainest and most obvious sense of the scriptures is in favour of those doctrines which are most agreeable to reason. A good man will rejoice to see them thus go hand in hand, mutually illustrating, and enforcing one another.

## II. *Of the power of man to do the will of God.*

**O**N E of the subjects, with respect to which I earnestly wish that you would attend to the voice of reason and the scriptures, and with respect to which, one mistake will be followed by many others,

and mistakes of great consequence, is concerning *the power of man to do the will of God*. It is a favourite opinion with many teachers of religion, that men have *naturally* (or by that constitution and frame which God their maker hath given them) no power at all to do any thing that is good, not even to think a good thought, much less actually to obey any of the commands of God; so that, if men were left to themselves, they could do nothing but sin, and must be under a necessity of aggravating their condemnation, by every thought, word, and action of their lives. But, my brethren, how does this doctrine agree with the scriptures, and particularly with the manner in which the Divine Being constantly expostulates with the sinful sons of men, as when he says to the Jews, *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, why will ye die, O House of Israel*. Ez. xxxiii. 11. *Wash ye, make ye clean; cease to do evil; learn to do well, &c. &c. &c.* Isa. i. 16.

Is it not plain from this, that it depends upon men themselves, whether they will repent and turn to God or not? And how can it depend upon themselves, if they have not, naturally, a sufficient power to do it? You cannot think that God would command, and expect obedience, when he had not given power to obey; and much less that he would urge men to provide for their own safety and happiness, when himself had put an effectual bar in the way of it.

Suppose that any man's children were shut up in a building that was on fire, while he himself was without, and had the key: and that, instead of opening the door to favour their escape, he should only call out to them to flee out of the place, in order to avoid instant destruction; and that, as the necessary consequence of this, they should all perish in the flames before his eyes; what would you think of such a father? You would want words to express your abhorrence of his cruelty; and yet in this very light do many christian divines represent the conduct of that God *whose tender mercies are over all his works*, and who has solemnly declared, *that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his way*  
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and live. Ez. xxxiii. 11; yea, who would have all men to be saved. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

The conduct of our merciful God and Father, is certainly far different from this, and more agreeable to reason and equity. If he designed us to be accountable creatures, and treats us as such, we must have talents given us, which we may either improve or misimprove. If we be the subjects of his moral government, we must be in a condition either to observe or to break his laws. A power to do the one, necessarily supposes a power to do the other; and without this power we should not be the proper subjects of religion; as, in that case, it would be vain to propose to us either rewards for obedience, or punishments for disobedience.

Nor is the supposition of a power in man to do the will of God, any foundation for pride. For we must still say, with the apostle, *What have we that we have not received? and how then can we glory, as if we had not received it?* Every good and every perfect gift comes from God; and, knowing this, the more we receive of his bounty, the more thankful, and the more humble we should be. I shall, certainly, be more solicitous to exert myself in doing the will of God, when I believe that I have a talent to improve, than if I believe that I have no talent intrusted with me at all; so that I cannot do even so much as the wicked and slothful servant, who hid his talent in a napkin.

Some of those persons who believe that all mankind are absolutely incapable of doing any good, are sometimes heard to invite sinners of all kinds to come to Christ, as they are, and to say, that the viler they are, the more welcome they will be to him; as if he was, after this, to cleanse them by some miraculous power. But, my brethren, the invitation of the gospel runs in very different terms. It is, *Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.* Mat. iii. 8: *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* Acts iii. 19. And none are invited to come to Christ, but those who labour and are heavy laden; nor can they find rest for their souls, till they have actually learned of him to be meek and lowly in heart. Matt. xi. 28.

What can be more contrary to the maxims above-

mentioned, than the whole tenour of that serious expostulation with the children of Israel in the prophet Isaiah, part of which I quoted above? *Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow, Come now (and not before) and let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Isa. i. 16, &c.

Others, who entertain the same opinion of the utter inability of man to do the will of God, act more consistently with those sentiments, but far more inconsistently with the scriptures, in never preaching to sinners at all; though to *call sinners to repentance*, was the chief end of Christ's coming into the world. *Matt. ix. 13.*

Whatever represents a state of acceptance with God, as a thing that may be brought about without any efforts of our own, and especially if it may be done in a moment, or in a very short space of time, is sure to be a popular doctrine. Mankind in general care not how little is expected of them, or how little they themselves have to do, in order to get to heaven. But true religion, that alone which affords solid ground of hope towards God, consists in a change of heart, affections, and habits; which can only be brought about by serious resolution, and a vigorous and constant exertion of our powers. Nay, unless a course of virtue be begun, and good habits formed early in life, there is very great danger that the *thorns, briers, or bad soil*, will prevent the good seed from ever coming to maturity.

To believe, as the same persons do, that faith and repentance are nothing that we ourselves are capable of, but altogether the miraculous operation of the Spirit of God in us and upon us, supposes that this great and sudden change may as well take place at the last hour of life, as at any other; which certainly encourages the most unwarrantable and most dangerous presumption, and is far from having any countenance in the scriptures. The word of God always represents a safe and *happy death* as the consequence of  
nothing



nothing but a good and *well-spent life*. Some indeed, are said to have been called at the *eleventh* hour, but none at the *twelfth*, when the time for labouring in the vineyard was quite over; and not one of the foolish virgins, who had neglected to provide themselves with oil, was admitted to the marriage supper.

### III. Of original sin.

AS a foundation for this strange doctrine, of the utter inability of men to do what God requires of them, a doctrine so injurious both to our Maker and ourselves, it is said that our first parent Adam was the representative of all his posterity; so that when he sinned, we all sinned; and, every sin being an offence against an infinite God, we all became, from that moment, liable to an infinite punishment, even the everlasting wrath and curse of our Maker. And they say, that, on this account only, it would have been just in God to have made us all suffer the most exquisite and endless torments in hell, even though we had never sinned in our own persons; and, moreover, that by this one offence, Adam, and all his posterity, lost all power of doing any thing acceptable to God for the future.

But, my brethren, you find nothing like any part of this in your bibles. For there you read, *The soul that sinneth, it shall die*. Ez. xviii. 4. And long after the transgression of Adam, and to this very day, God is continually calling upon men to *cease to do evil, and learn to do well*: which certainly supposes that men always have had, and that we now have, a power to do so. It is allowed that we *suffer* by the sin of Adam, as any child may suffer in consequence of the wickedness of his ancestor; but it is not possible that we should have *sinned* in him. Wherever there is *sin*, there is *guilt*, that is something that may be the foundation of *remorse* of conscience; something that a man may be *sorry for*, and *repent of*; something that he may wish he had not done; all which clearly implies, that sin is something that a man has given his *consent* to, and therefore must be convinced of the



reasonableness of his being punished for. But how can any man repent of the sin of Adam, or feel any thing like remorse of conscience for it; when he cannot but know that he never gave his consent to it, and could not possibly have been, in the least degree, accessory to it? Good and bad conduct are, in their own nature, *personal*, and cannot possibly be transferred from one to another. Whatever some divines pretend, nothing of this kind can be *imputed* in this sense of the word. We may receive harm by means of one person, and benefit by means of another (which is St. Paul's meaning, where he speaks of *imputation*) but no sin of the former, or righteousness of the latter, can be considered as ours, in the eye of an equitable and just God. The contrary is as much the language and the plain meaning of the scriptures throughout, as it is agreeable to the common sense and reason that God has given us.

#### IV. *Of Election and Reprobation.*

**S**UPPOSING that all mankind became liable to the everlasting wrath and curse of God for the sin of one man, some divines say, that it was mercy in God to save any, though by an *arbitrary decree*, which left all the rest of the human race under an inevitable necessity of perishing. But certainly, my brethren, such *tender mercy is cruelty*. All the creatures of God must look up to him as the author of their being, since it was undoubtedly, in his power to give, or to withhold it, at his pleasure; and, surely, a good and merciful God would have put a stop to the propagation of such a race of creatures, rather than suffer them to be born in such shocking circumstances; in which he infallibly foresaw, that the greatest part of them must be exposed to, and even actually suffer remediless destruction. As surely as I derive my being from a just and merciful God, I conclude that the terms on which I come into the world are advantageous to me; and therefore, that it must be my own fault only, if I have not reason to rejoice in it, and to be thankful for it. But, indeed, I can hardly think that  
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any man seriously believes, that the greatest part of his fellow creatures are born into the world under a predetermined necessity of being for ever miserable. For, in that case, it must appear probable that any children which he himself may be the means of bringing into the world will be for ever miserable; and surely no man of real goodness or compassion would wish to have children, or be accessary to their being born in such circumstances.

If this doctrine be true, what motive can any man have to endeavour to *flee from the wrath to come*, Mat. iii. 7. when, if it is to be his lot at all, nothing that he can do will enable him to escape it, or what motive can a man have to exert himself to *lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi. 12. when, if he is to enjoy it at all, he cannot possibly miss of it, or of any thing belonging to it, or that is necessary to prepare him for it? What reason had the apostle Paul to exhort christians to *take heed lest they should fall*, 1 Cor. x. 12. when none that ever did stand could possibly fall, and what reason had he to labour, *lest after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away*, 1. Cor. ix. 27. when, being certain of his conversion, he must have known that that consequence was impossible?

This doctrine, of absolute election and reprobation, is certainly a doctrine of *licentiousness*, and not a *doctrine according to godliness*; and let divines employ all the ingenuity they are masters of, it is impossible for them to clear this opinion from being the cause of fatal despair in some, and as fatal a security in others. If this opinion were true, and men were really aware of their situation, I should think it impossible to prevent their falling into absolute distraction, through terror and anxiety. It would be like a man having his *all*, his *life*, nay infinitely more than his life, depending upon the cast of a die; the decree of God being a thing that he has as little power to command. Besides, this doctrine certainly represents the God and Father of us all in such a light, as no man would chuse that he himself should appear in.

## V. Of the divinity of Christ.

**S**O fatal have the consequences of the sin of Adam been represented, that you have been told, that nothing but the blood of God himself could reverse them; and therefore you have been taught to believe, that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is *the son of man*, as well as *the son of God*, was not *man*, but very and eternal *God* himself, without considering that, by thus making more Gods than one, you are guilty of a breach of the first and most important of all the commandments, which says expressly, *Thou shalt have no other Gods besides me*. Exod. xx. 3. But whatever such divines may say, the apostle Paul says, in direct contradiction to them, *To us there is but one God, the FATHER, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*. 1 Cor. viii. 6. And again, after saying that we have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, he adds, *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. Eph. iv. 5, 6. The creed of all christians, therefore, ought to be, *There is ONE GOD, and one mediator between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus*, 1 Tim. ii. 5.

The Father is frequently stiled *God*, even with respect to Christ, as well as other beings. *The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto you, that ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, &c.* Eph. i. 17, &c. Christ himself uses the same language, *I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and unto my God and your God*, John xx. 17. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Christ who was *the Image of the invisible God*, and the *first-born* (or *most excellent*) of all his creatures, Col. i. 15, and in whom *dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*, Col. ii. 9, acknowledged that his Father was greater than he, John  
xiv.

xiv. 28, and, indeed, upon all occasions, and in the clearest terms, he expressed his dependence upon God his father, for all his power and glory; as if he had purposely intended to guard his disciples, against forming too high an opinion of the dignity of their master. *Verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself,* v. 19. *I can of mine own self do nothing. As I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I speak not mine own will, but the will of the father who sent me.* v. 30. *The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwelleth in me, he doth the works.* xiv. 10. *I live by the Father.* vi. 57. *The Father hath given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment.* v. 26, 27. *All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth.* Matt. xxviii, 18. He even calls his Father *the only true God.* John xvii. 3. *that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* It appears to me not to be in the power of language to exclude the idea of the divinity of Christ more expressly than by these solemn words.

Notwithstanding the divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark xiii. 32, *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father:* in Matthew xxiv. 36, where the same observation is repeated, *but my Father only.*

The apostles, notwithstanding their attachment to their Lord and Master, always preserve the idea of his subordination to the Father, and consider all his honour and power as derived from him. *He received from God the Father, honour and glory,* 2 Peter i. 17. *It pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell,* 1 Col. i. 19. *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him,* Rev. i. 1. *We are Christ's, and Christ is God's,* 1 Cor. iii. 23. *The head of Christ is God,* 1 Cor. xi. 3.

The reason why Christ was so much distinguished by God the Father, is frequently and fully expressed in the scriptures, viz. his obedience to the will of  
God,



God, and especially his submitting to die for the benefit of mankind. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, John x. 17. He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. ii. 8—11. Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. Heb. xii. 2.*

Our Lord says, that *he and his Father are one.* John x. 30. but he sufficiently explains himself, when he prays that all his disciples may be *one with him, and his Father, even as they two are one.* ib. xvii. 11. *and he gives them the same glory which God had given to him,* ver. 22. Besides, at the very time that our Lord says, that he and his father are one, and in the very sentence preceding it, ver. 25, he says, that *his Father is greater than all.* But how could the Father be greater than all, if there was any other, who was so much *one* with him, as to be, in all respects, *equal* to him.

The mere term *God* is, indeed, sometimes used in a lower and inferior sense in the scriptures, denoting *dominion* only; as when the Divine Being himself says that *he will make Moses a god to Pharaoh,* Exod. vii. 1; but, surely, there can be no danger of our mistaking the sense of such phrases as these; or if it were possible, our Lord himself has sufficiently guarded against any misconstruction of them when applied to himself, by the explanation he has given of them; informing us, that, if, in the language of scripture, *they are called gods to whom the word of God came,* John x. 35, (though, in fact, they were no other than mere men) he could not be guilty of blasphemy in calling himself only *the Son of God.* Now if Christ had been conscious to himself that he was the *true and very God,* and that it was the utmost consequence to mankind that they should regard him in that light, this was certainly a proper time for him to have declared himself, and not to have put his hearers off with such an apology as this. But



Till this great corruption of christianity be removed, it will be in vain to preach the gospel to Jews, or Mahometans, or, indeed, to any people who retain the use of the reason and understanding that God has given them. For how is it possible that *three* persons, *Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all divine perfections, so as to be *true, very, and eternal* God, and yet that there should be but *one* God; a truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it; or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our creed, as utterly irreconcilable with the more favourite doctrine of a *Trinity*, a term which is not to be found in the scriptures. Things *above* our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be true; but things expressly *contrary* to our reason, as that *three* should be *one*, and *one* *three*, can never appear to us to be so.

With the Jews, the doctrine of the Divine Unity is, and indeed justly, considered as the most fundamental principle of all religion. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.* Deut. vi. 4. Mark xii. 29. To preach the doctrine of the Trinity to the Jews, can appear to them in no other light, than an attempt to seduce them into *idolatry*, a thing which they dare not entertain the most distant thought of.

The great creed of the Mahometans is, that *There is one God, and Mahomet is his prophet*. Now that Mahomet is not the prophet of God, it is to be hoped they may, in time, be brought to believe; but we must not expect that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God. To make the gospel what it was originally, *glad tidings of great joy*; and as at last it certainly will be to all the nations of the world, we must free it from this most absurd and impious doctrine, and also from many other corruptions which have been introduced into it. It can no otherwise appear worthy of God, and favourable to the virtue and happiness of mankind.

## VI. Of ATONEMENT for sin by the death of Christ.

**Y**OU have been taught by divines, that if Christ be not God, he could not have made an *infinite satisfaction* for the sins of mankind. But, my brethren, where do you learn that the pardon of sin, in a finite creature, requires an infinite satisfaction; or, indeed, any satisfaction at all, besides repentance and reformation, on the part of a sinner? We read in the scriptures that we are *justified freely by the grace of God*. Rom. iii. 24; but what free grace, or mercy, does there appear to have been in God, if Christ gave a full price for our justification, and bore the infinite weight of divine wrath on our account. We are commanded to *forgive others, as we ourselves hope to be forgiven*. Matt. vii. 12. and to be *merciful, as our Father, who is in heaven, is merciful*. But surely we are not thereby authorized to insist upon any atonement, or satisfaction, before we give up our resentment towards an offending and penitent brother. Indeed, how could it deserve the name of *forgiveness* if we did? If he only *repent*, we are commanded to *forgive* him. Luke xvii. 4.

You read in the scriptures that Christ died a *sacrifice for our sins*. Heb. ix. 26. So he did, and a sacrifice it was, of a *sweet smelling savour to God*. To die, as Christ did, in the glorious cause of truth and virtue; to die, as he did, in order to show us an example of patiently suffering death for our religion, and the good of mankind, and in a firm hope of a resurrection to a future and eternal life; to die, as he did, in express attestation of his own divine mission, by his manifest resurrection from the dead, and as the fullest proof of that doctrine, by means of which sinners are continually reconciled unto God, was a noble sacrifice indeed. We also are commanded to *yield our bodies living sacrifices*. Rom. xii. 1. And we are required to offer the *sacrifices of praise continually*. Psal. cxvi. 17. But it is plain that all these are only figurative expressions, and used by way of comparison. Neither our *bodies*, nor  
our

our prayers, can be considered as *real* sacrifices; nor are we, therefore, obliged to suppose that Christ was a real sacrifice. And though we, like him, should be called actually to *lay down our lives for our brethren*; 1 John iii. 16, which, in imitation of him, we are enjoined to be ready to do, we should be sacrifices only in the figurative sense of the word.

It is true, that no man who is a sinner (and all men have sinned) can be *justified by his works*. We all stand in need of, and must have recourse to *free grace and mercy*; but it is a great dishonour to God to suppose that this mercy and grace takes its rise from any thing but his own essential goodness; and that he is not *of himself*, and independent of all foreign considerations whatever, what he solemnly declared himself to Moses, at the time of the giving of the law, to be, namely, *a God merciful and gracious, long suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth*, Exod. xxxiv. 6; or that he requires any other sacrifices, but *the sacrifice of a broken spirit, and a contrite heart, which he will never despise*. Psalm li. 17.

Can we wish for a more distinct, and perfect representation of the manner in which God forgives the sins of his offspring of mankind, than our saviour has exhibited to us in that most excellent parable of the *prodigal son*; in which the good father no sooner sees his child, who had abandoned him, and wasted his substance in riotous living, returning to him and to his duty; but, without waiting for any atonement or propitiation, even *while he was yet a great way off, he ran to him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him*. Luke xv. 20. The same representation we see in the parable of the creditor, who freely forgave his servant, because he humbly *desired* him. Let us not then, my brethren, deprive the ever blessed God of the most glorious and honourable of all his attributes, and leave him nothing but *justice*, or rather *vengeance*, which is expressly said to be *his strange work*. Isaiah xxviii. 21.

These, my brethren, are the principal heads on which I proposed to expostulate with you, in the plain and free manner in which I have done. Do you yourselves, *search the scriptures, and see whether these things*  
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*be so. Pray to the God of truth, to lead you into all truth, and may he give you understanding in all things.*

VII. *Practical consequences of the above doctrines*

THE sound knowledge of christianity is not of importance as a matter of *speculation* merely; though abstract truths, especially truths that relate to God, and the maxims of his moral government, are not without their utility and obligation; but the truths that I here contend for nearly affect the sentiments of our hearts, and our conduct in life; as, indeed, has been shown in many respects, already. Considering God as possessed of the character in which some divines represent him, it is impossible, while human nature is what it is, that he should appear in an amiable or respectable light. Such a God may, indeed, be the object of *dread* and *terror* to his creatures, but by no means of their *love* or *reverence*. And what is obedience without love. It cannot be that of the *heart*, which, however, is the only thing that is of any real value in religion. Also how can a man love his fellow-creatures in general, when he considers the greatest part of them as the objects of the divine abhorrence, and doomed by him to an everlasting destruction, in which he believes that he himself must for ever rejoice? And what can remain of virtue, when these two great sources of it, the *love of God* and of *mankind*, are thus grossly corrupted? Lastly, how must the genuine spirit of *mercy* and *forgiveness*, which so eminently distinguishes the gospel of Christ, be debased, when God himself (whose conduct in this very respect is particularly proposed to our imitation) is considered as never forgiving sin without some previous atonement, satisfaction, or intercession.

On the other hand, loving God, as the compassionate Father of all his offspring, as *willing that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of his truth*; and also loving all mankind as our brethren, as, together with ourselves, the children of the same gracious Father, we cannot want the most generous  
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and powerful motives to do the will of God, and to provoke one another to love and to good works; being in no fear of counteracting the secret designs of the Almighty, which we believe are aimed, not at the destruction, but the happiness of all his creatures.

Think not however, that I am so uncharitable as to suppose that all those who profess to maintain the doctrines I have been arguing against, are universally destitute of the genuine love of God, or of their fellow-creatures. I am sensible, and truly thankful, that it is not always the consequence; but it is because the hearts of such persons are really influenced by better principles than those which they avow. They by no means habitually regard the Divine Being in the light in which their principles represent him, but as the true Father of all the creatures that he has made, and, as such, are sincerely desirous to promote their best interests.

Also, notwithstanding, if they be asked, they will not hesitate to say, that Christ is God, the supremacy of the Father, even with respect to the Son, is, at the same time, the real sentiment of their minds; and when they lift up their hearts to God, it is only God the Father that is the proper object of their adoration. The constant tenor of the scriptures is so contrary to their professed creed, that though they dare not call it in question, it is not able to counteract the plainer, more consistent, and better principles which will force themselves upon their minds from conversing with the bible.

Besides, it requires more subtilty and refinement to enter into the principles above-mentioned, than the common people are masters of. They cannot conceive how one man should sin, and another person, six thousand years after, be guilty of that sin, and punishable for it; how one person's righteousness should be considered as the righteousness of another; or that three distinct persons should each of them be God, and yet that there should be no more gods than one.

Men of plain understandings, in fact, never do believe any such thing; nor can it be supposed that the gospel, which was intended to be the solid foundation  
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of the faith, hope, and joy of common people, should require so much acuteness, as is necessary to give even a plausible colour to these strange assertions. The attempt to explain them (and, till they be explained, they can no more be believed than a proposition in an unknown tongue) can lead to nothing but endless and unprofitable controversy. It is happy, therefore, that so many persons make a better use of the gospel than their tenets would lead them to do; and that they consider it chiefly as a *rule of life*; and the *foundation of hope after death*. But, as far as the principles I have been arguing against are believed, they cannot but do harm to those who entertain them, as well as bring disgrace upon the christian name; both which every *lover of the gospel* should endeavour to prevent.

*A practical exhortation, and conclusion.*

PROFESSING the purity of the christian faith, let us be careful, my brethren, to adorn it by a blameless and exemplary life. More especially let us beware that we do not wear *the form of godliness*, when our hearts are destitute of the *power* of it; and that we indulge no secret hope, that by any peculiar strictness and austerity of life, by frequent or long prayers, or by attending on much preaching, and using other means of religion, we shall atone for a neglect of the *weightier matters of the law, righteousness, mercy and truth*. Let the integrity of our hearts appear in the cheerfulness of our countenances, and let us show that *we love God whom we have not seen*, by loving our *brethren whom we do see*, and by being always ready to do them every kind office in our power.

To judge of our love to God, or of our love to Christ, directly, by what we *feel* when we think of them, especially when we are excluded from the world, as is the custom with many, is to expose ourselves to the grossest and most dangerous delusions. We find in the scriptures a much plainer, and safer method of judging in both these cases. *This*, says the apostle John, *is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. If ye love me, says our Lord, keep my commandments. Ye*  
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*are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you; and this is my commandment, that ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another*

Remember that true Christian charity is humble, modest, and diffident; and that he is pronounced to be happy, who *feareth always*, so as to be circumspect in thought, word, and deed; and that, for this purpose, we are to *put on the whole armour of God*, that we may withstand the temptations of the world.

Rather than indulge a Pharisaical pride, in recounting your *experiences*, boasting how vile you have once been, or thought yourselves to be, in order to make others believe how holy and sanctified you are now, content yourselves with the language and practice of the humble publican, who, speaking to God and his own heart only, cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner*.

Rejoice in all the real good you see done by others, whatever may be their ill will, or opposition to you; and be especially upon your guard, lest your just aversion to what is corrupt in the principles or practices of others, lead you to dislike what is good in them. Let not the *Pharisaical rigour* of some throw you into the opposite extreme of *levity*; and let not their laying an undue stress upon praying, preaching, and other means of religion, make you neglect them, as we are too apt to do, with respect to any thing that has been much abused.

Having enough to do with our own hearts, let us be particularly upon our guard against that spirit of *ensoriousness*, which many professing Christians indulge with too little restraint. Let us remember that the true Christian *beareth all things, and hopeth all things*; and let us never forget the awful warning of our Lord, *Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*.

Be not moved, my brethren, by the rash censures and reproaches of others. *Persecution*, of some kind, is what all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must expect to suffer in this world. To their wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, answer with the wisdom that is from above; which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be

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*be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Let us even rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame, and insult, for the sake of Christ; though our sufferings come not from the professed enemies of Christ, but from false brethren; and let us not be concerned at being counted deceivers, if we be conscious to ourselves that we truly love the gospel, and that we labour to promote and adorn it.*

You will be called *Arminians* and *Socinians* by your adversaries, or something else that shall express more of their hatred and dislike. But let not this offend you. If there be any proper meaning in those epithets, it can only be that you hold certain opinions, which they deem to be false, but which you cherish, as the only genuine doctrines of the gospel. If nothing more is meant by those terms, besides mere reproach and abuse, think yourselves happy, as being reproached for the name of Christ. 1 Peter iv. 14. With many the appellation of *Lutheran* or *Calvinist* is reproachful, and with many also, that of *Christian* is much more so. Besides, both *Arminius* and *Socinus* were men who loved the gospel, and who suffered more for their adherence to it, than most others of the reformers, especially *Socinus*.

If we be Christians indeed, we shall consider ourselves as not of this world, but as citizens of heaven. The friendship of this world, therefore, together with popularity, and success in it, ought not to be considered as any object for us. If we abide in Christ, and walk even as he also walked, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we are heirs of a far nobler inheritance; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us; and when Christ, who is our life, and for whom we suffer reproach, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory,

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